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“No Such Thing as Level”: An Architectural Collaboration between Wharton Esherick and Louis Kahn

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In 1956, two friends carved their initials, LIK and WE, into a speckled blue wall. Wharton Esherick (1887-1970) and Louis Isadore Kahn (1901-1974) had worked together for two years to create a workshop for Esherick in Paoli, Pennsylvania.[1] This building has come to be known as either the Esherick Studio Addition or the 1956 Workshop (fig. 1).[2] Thus far, literature about this collaboration has been limited to the fact that the Workshop was constructed under an informal arrangement between the two men as friends.[3] However, the nature of the relationship between Kahn and Esherick as friends and as artists and the history of Esherick's Workshop have remained a mystery since their deaths in the 1970s. This intensive study of the 1956 Workshop is intended to fill the aforementioned gap in scholarship and establish a comprehensive history of this valuable architectural project.

The final form of the Workshop makes it difficult to pinpoint which designer was responsible for any one decision, and as such, the essence of their partnership is a challenge to distinguish. Therefore, the whole of both artists' careers up to the point that the Workshop was built needs to be analyzed in order to understand each of their contributions and the manner in which those contributions were handled. Kahn, as well as Anne Tyng, who was also closely involved with this structure, initially dominated the project, mainly in ideology and overall form. However, Esherick's clever, underhanded alterations forced his hand into the foreground. This dynamic, a sort of skewed commission, leaves the Workshop unable to be categorized in either

[1] When the Workshop was built, the property was in Paoli. Today, the area is known as Malvern.
[2] In Kahn scholarship, it is always referred to as the Esherick Studio Addition, probably to avoid confusion with the Margaret Esherick House. In Esherick scholarship, the building is referred to as the 1956 Workshop to clarify its distinction from the 1926 Studio. For the purposes of this paper, I will be referring to it as "the Workshop."
[3] The two main sources I have used for this essay, *Journey of a Creative Mind* by Mansfield Bascom and *Houses of Louis Kahn* by William Whitaker, both briefly mention the Workshop. While some of their relationship is examined in the study of the Margaret Esherick House, that collaboration fell through and therefore represents the end of their relationship. While this study has value in its own right, it lacks the context of their true friendship to begin with. Therefore, it is a flawed analysis without the examination of the Workshop collaboration.

artist's style and therefore vastly overlooked in scholarship, despite its incredibly valuable history to the study of both men.

Making Changes, Making Friends, Making Plans

Wharton Esherick moved to Paoli, Pennsylvania with his wife in 1916.[4] As his artistic career developed, he built a series of structures on his property that provided enough space for him to work. When he transitioned away from painting and printmaking to woodworking, Esherick partnered with John Schmidt, a cabinet maker living about a mile away, to produce his more intricate designs in his workshop.[5] Esherick was not trained in woodworking, so the combination of his artistic vision and Schmidt's technical knowledge made many of his designs possible.

In the early 1950s, Schmidt sold his property, including the workshop where he and Esherick worked. With the passing of a relative around the same time, Esherick was left with an inheritance large enough to build a workshop of his own.[6] He had not needed permits from the township when building his previous Studio in 1926, but recent laws required the involvement of an architect when creating new structures (fig. 2). Initially, Esherick reached out to George Howe, a prominent architect and friend, but Howe was preoccupied with his recent appointment as Chair of the Architectural Department at Yale University. Instead, Howe recommended his contemporary Louis I. Kahn. Kahn and Esherick had met previously around 1952 and had been friends since.[7] By the 1950s, Kahn was starting to make a name for himself. The Philadelphian

[4] Mansfield Bascom, *Wharton Esherick: The Journey of a Creative Mind* (New York: Abrams, 2010)
[5] Ibid.
[6] Mansfield Bascom and Roger Thorne. *Ruth Esherick Bascom: The Extraordinary Life and Times of an Artist's Daughter* (Berwyn: Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society, 2017)
[7] Mansfield Bascom in discussion with the author, 6 November 2019.

architect was just beginning to move away from the International Style and develop his own architectural philosophy and aesthetic. He had most recently completed his Trenton Bath House, to which Tyng also contributed, and Yale University's Art Gallery addition. Elements of both these buildings are reflected in the Workshop's design, as analyzed in later sections. When Esherick approached Kahn for this project, he and his partner Tyng agreed to collaborate with Esherick.[8]

Esherick, Kahn, and Tyng gathered at Esherick's Studio one evening in 1954 to discuss the design. Esherick had built a small cardboard model of his property, and Tyng made a few model roofs to serve as inspiration. Shot glasses were set on the model and the roofs were balanced on top; with each change, the three designers filled and subsequently emptied the glasses with scotch.[9] At the end of the evening they had decided upon a design consisting of three hexagonal structures,[10] connected at one edge along a curve, which would have a completely open interior.

The Workshop

The Workshop is situated between Esherick's original Studio and his Garage, built in 1926 and 1928 respectively (fig. 3). The Studio and the Workshop are both set partially into the hillside, overlooking the Great Valley. In the valley below this site sits Sunekrest, the original

[8] For the sake of this analysis, I will be treating Kahn and Tyng as a unit and, unless specified otherwise in discussion of the Workshop, will refer to them collectively as "Kahn." I do recognize Tyng's contributions and talent as an architect in her own right, but to prevent confusion, the focus of this analysis is the collaboration and relationship between Esherick and Kahn individually. When necessary, I will make a note of Tyng's specific contributions, which can often go overlooked.

[9] Mansfield Bascom in discussion with the author, 6 November 2019.

[10] Esherick thought these looked like the quartz crystals found in the area (hence Diamond Rock Road), but Tyng said they were honeycomb shaped, which was a form she liked to work with. Mansfield Bascom in discussion with the author, 6 November 2019.

property that Esherick purchased in 1916.[11] The property and driveway run parallel to Horse Shoe Trail and perpendicular to Diamond Rock Road, which steadily climbs the side of the hill. The property is surrounded by forest on all sides, buffering sound and creating shade for the majority of the site. However, the Workshop sits in a relatively sunny spot, which allows sunlight to create various effects both on the building and on the surrounding area.

The exterior walls of the Workshop, standing over twelve feet at the peaks and about eight feet in the valleys, are a once-bright robin's egg blue, in stark contrast to the brown buildings and tree trunks around them. Esherick had painted the stucco with green and red pigment before deciding on the blue. Over the blue, he added a thin black layer so the blue would "bloom" from underneath as it faded.[12] A walk along the driveway on the north side of the building first reveals an imposing loading door, breaking up the speckled blue with deep brown, made from the angled wood planks that reflect the slanted roofline (fig. 4). Continuing along the northern edge will show an almost unsettling lack of windows. Nothing breaks up the solid facade except the carved-out joints between the cinder blocks that make up the walls. There is no sign of glass until the seam between the Workshop and Esherick's Garage, where there is a small clerestory window and a twisting chimney, painted Esherick's favorite dusty plum.

Coming around the Garage with its bright yellow and green striped logs (which is now the Visitor Center for the Wharton Esherick Museum) a path leads to the pedestrian entrance of the Workshop. The blue painted screen door, nestled under a triangular awning (which is not original to the structure), hides among the vastness of the exterior (fig. 5). Continuing along the exterior walls would lead to the viewer stumbling down into the Great Valley; the elevation

[11] Mansfield Bascom, *Wharton Esherick: The Journey of a Creative Mind* (New York: Abrams, 2010)
[12] Ibid.

severely drops on the southern edge of the foundation. If at construction there were an easier way to reach the southern walls from the outside, the viewer that would have fallen could see where all of the Workshop's windows are (fig. 6). The southern-facing walls are nearly all glass, the windows spanning from the roofline to about three feet above the foundation. The windows are narrow and varying lengths, the bottom and top of each window never lining up with the windows on either side of it. The windows stretch across the three innermost walls, ensuring that anyone inside would only see the valley spanning before them. Each hexagon has its own roof, now a brilliantly patinated copper, with small skylights at the seams where the light from the inner windows cannot reach.[13] The original roof was made of asphalt shingles and was set up for drainage so that rain water would flow into a gutter between roofs and down into a concrete gutter on the ground. This would direct water away from the foundation to prevent erosion; Esherick also built systems similar to this on his Studio.

The interior of the Workshop at the time of construction and when Esherick was actively using it as a work space is difficult to reconstruct due to a lack of photographs.[14] However, it has been made clear that each of the three hexagons that the building is made up of had a distinct use.[15] The westmost section has a loading door which was used to bring in larger pieces of lumber for sculpting. Once inside the first section, the wood would be cut to the general size Esherick needed it to be. From here it would progress to the center hexagon, where the majority of the artistic process would take place. This section is also where Esherick stored and dried

[13] These skylights and other clerestory windows were added later by Mansfield Bascom, when he and Ruth Esherick moved in. (Mansfield Bascom in discussion with the author, 6 November 2019.)
[14] Esherick never wanted to be studied. When approached by individuals that he thought would use him as a teaching example (journalists, art historians, etc.) he would instruct them to come to the Studio and let his work speak for him.
[15] Mansfield Bascom in discussion with the author, 6 November 2019.

most of his wood on racks against the windows later in his career. When a work was nearly finished, it would be moved to the final section on the eastmost end of the building. Here is where the works would be sanded, smoothed, and finished with linseed oil. This is the section where the screen door is, as well as a bathroom and a fireplace that straddled the wall between the central and final sections, where the Workshop meets the back of Esherick's Garage.

In addition to the flow of Esherick's work process, the building was also well suited for the craft of woodworking. A simple yet ingenious system of booms and pulleys allowed for logs to be brought into the workspace and moved from room to room with ease. The floor was made of cheap, industrial-grade oak, so that any damage it sustained (which surely was quite a bit) would not be a loss.[16] Finally, the windows placed only on the south-facing walls do not fit the typical desires of an artist. Windows on the north-facing side of a studio allow for a soft light throughout the day. South-facing windows create a much more harsh light, undesirable for many artists, but Esherick craved the view of the Great Valley that this positioning allowed him.[17] The constant sunlight also allowed the wood he stored there to dry out faster than it had in the lean-to style woodshed he used previously.

Two Friends

Esherick and Kahn were very similar, both as people and as artists. Each only arrived at his distinct style in his 50s, had a habit of changing his work halfway through production, and was very stubborn in his artistic ideologies. Esherick often jested that Kahn was "the only

[16] Mansfield Bascom in discussion with the author, 6 November 2019.
[17] Anne Tyng in conversation with Mansfield Bascom, Ruth Esherick Bascom, and Sue Hinkel. June 1987. Just before the planning of the Workshop, a Nike missile site had been built just off of Yellow Springs Road, only a few miles away. Esherick may have wanted to use the workshop in part as a barrier between his home and the road, as military vehicles would drive past relatively often.

architect he could get along with," but that he "would be a better architect if he didn't talk as much."[18] Despite these striking similarities and their amicable relationship, the two possessed contrasting styles and approaches to their work.

The evolution of Kahn's aesthetic began with his training in the Beaux Arts style.[19] Paradoxically, this ornate and elegant style drew out of him a liking for minimalistic and unornamented structures. Time spent as Architect in Residence at the American Academy in Rome in 1951 kindled an interest in the elegance of the ruins there, and his style became even more simplified. This simplicity is evident in his early projects working with Oscar Storonov and George Howe, which closely followed the tenets of the International Style. This style is also seen in his individual projects later, such as the extension of the Yale Art Gallery (1953) and the Morton and Lenore Weiss House (1950). Glass and concrete dominate these designs, maintaining rectilinear forms and strictly conforming to modernist ideals.

The exterior of the Art Gallery is monolithic, with two bare brick walls and two made entirely of glass (fig. 7).[20] The whole of this building is rectilinear, sitting in contrast to the ornate neo-Gothic wing to the east of it. Despite complaints from Yale faculty and students, Kahn insisted that changes in weather, such as rain and sunlight, would create patterns and shapes on the wall, tying in the environment surrounding the building.[21] Light influences the interior as well, illuminating the simplified gallery spaces from the windows on the west and north sides. Similarly, the Weiss house has windows all along the southern edge, overlooking the rest of the property (fig. 8). The careful placement of windows in both of these spaces allows for

[18] Mansfield Bascom, *Wharton Esherick: The Journey of a Creative Mind* (New York: Abrams, 2010)
[19] Wendy Lesser, *You Say to Brick: The Life of Louis Kahn* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017)
[20] Stones were substituted for concrete in domestic spaces, and wood was included to create a more intimate environment. Tyng's contributions were often in wood, including the ceilings and roofs.
[21] John W. Cook and Heinrich Klotz. *Conversations with Architects* (New York: Praeger, 1973)

sunlight to enter into them in exactly the way each needs. The Art Gallery needs bright light from the north to replicate that of an artist's studio, while the Weiss house needs southern exposure to provide soft light that is easily mediated by Kahn's "double-hung sash system."[22]

However, the exterior of the home is more wood and stone than it is glass.[23] The home is overall very angular, with gently sloping roofs and straight walls, but it does not feel sterile or intimidating. In relation to that, the focus of Kahn's buildings was always how his client would use the spaces he created. The Art Gallery is the quintessential "White Cube" gallery space, with high interior walls, movable lighting, and a tranquil interior free of distractions. The Weiss House, likewise, is more than a house; it quickly became a home for Morton and Lenore Weiss.[24] The distinction in both floor plan and foundation level between the kitchen, living spaces, and bedrooms separates the "servant" and "served" spaces, which became a common theme in Kahn's homes; spaces for working are kept away from spaces for rest or introspection.[25] The home also included a hand painted mural in the *inglenook,* a small living space surrounding the fireplace, reflecting the couple's love for the countryside and contemporary art in its motifs.[26]

However, with the design of the Trenton Bath House in 1954, the last major project before Kahn's collaboration with Esherick, these principles began to evolve (fig. 9). Commissioned by the Jewish Community Center of the Delaware Valley, the structure was intended to be an entrance point and changing area for a pool and recreation complex that were

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[22] George H. Marcus and William Whitaker, *The Houses of Louis Kahn* (New Haven: Yale, 2013) page 120. The panels covering the windows here could be rearranged. There were both opaque and translucent panels.
[23] When discussing the stone sections of the Weiss's home, Kahn recommended that they visit Esherick's original Studio to study his stonework. He had carved out the mortar between the stones and did not cut or split them. Kahn was pleasantly surprised when the Weiss's said they were very familiar with Esherick's Studio, as they visited him often on their walks!
[24] George H. Marcus and William Whitaker, *The Houses of Louis Kahn* (New Haven: Yale, 2013)
[25] Ibid. These terms are used to discuss the intent of the spaces rather than the individuals who occupied them.
[26] Ibid.

not completed until 2012. The design process was a collaboration between Kahn and Tyng, each injecting their own principles into the final product. The building itself is made of four separate pavilions — a key feature that would later become one of Kahn's trademark designs — with the four roofs each sharing a corner pilaster with the two adjacent to it. This interlocking geometry became especially common in Kahn's domestic designs. The tall cinder block walls do not meet with the roofline; the gap between them leaves several feet for sunlight and fresh air to filter into the changing rooms. Tyng's design for the roofs was particularly influential for later constructions. She used thick wooden beams aligned vertically from the base to the peak to create a low tetrahedron with an oculus. Both the gap between the walls and the roof and the oculus at the roof peaks exemplify the pair's growing interest in the manipulation of natural light. This project solidified the creative partnership between Kahn and Tyng, as well as the ways their buildings interact with light, space, and usage.

Esherick arrived at his distinct style through a combination of his practice in different media, his exploration of European styles, and an ultimate articulation of his artistic identity. His formal training and career as a painter were not fruitful, and he was only slightly more successful as a printmaker.[27] After experimenting with carving frames for an exhibit in Fairhope, Alabama, Esherick found that woodworking, especially creating sculptures and furniture, was where he could express himself most freely. Initially, inspired by his trip to Europe in 1906, he started making furniture in the Arts and Crafts and German Expressionist styles, as seen in his *Drop Leaf Desk* (1925-27) and the bottom of the *Flat Top Desk* (1929-62) respectively (fig. 10, fig.

[27] Esherick illustrated multiple books while working with the Centaur press, including Walt Whitman's *Song of the Broadaxe* and *Song of Solomon,* and Mary Marcy's *Rhymes of Early Jungle Folk.*

11). Though very different in outward appearance, both works were experiments with the material of wood.

His *Drop Leaf Desk* was initially carved to be a sales desk for his prints. With flat storage, a leather pull-down desktop, and many organized filing spaces, this desk certainly filled that role. However, its most notable feature is the exterior. A carved scene of the Great Valley, stylized into geometric linear forms, fills the entirety of the front surface in three distinct registers. The cabinet doors on the bottom of the desk depict the low shrubbery and brush surrounding the property. The underside of the desktop, the center register, displays a carving of the canopy under which Esherick worked. At the time of this work, the treeline was surely much lower, but Esherick desired to capture that feeling rather than direct imagery. Finally, the top register shows two turkey vultures flying high above the trees.

While this carving certainly was desirable for the Arts & Crafts style, Esherick did not feel that it was *his* style. Given that, he attempted working in the German Expressionist style. Esherick built three notable structures in this style: an outhouse, his Garage, and a desk. The outhouse was the first of the trio, built in 1927; it only had three sides and a triangular seat.[28] The actual shape of the outhouse was inspired by the surreal horror film *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1921), from which Esherick copied the shape of the cabinet in which the character Cesare sleeps.[29] More loosely inspired by this film is Esherick's Garage (fig. 12). Nearly every surface of this building is intentionally warped or twisted, creating a surreal and distorted experience for anyone viewing it. The roofline is offset, creating a scalene triangle on the front

[28] Esherick had said that if the door of the outhouse was open, that signalled that it was occupied. He said that he did not want to miss the view of the Great Valley.
[29] "The Influence of German Expressionism On Filmmakers…and an Outhouse," Wharton Esherick Museum, accessed 21 November 2019. https://whartonesherickmuseum.org/the-influence-of-german-expressionism-on-filmmakers-and-an-outhouse/

and the back of the building. Despite the odd construction, Esherick was able to complete the roof's frame by using logs that had been warped rather than well-preserved ones. After splitting the logs, Esherick put the concave halves on one side of the roof and the convex halves on the other, finishing off the twisted appearance. Esherick painted the logs on the side of the Garage bright yellow and green, adding even more to the surreal aesthetic. The latest of these works is the *Flat Top Desk,* which is now combined with a later work. The bottom is very similar to the Garage, with angled sides and triangular features. Made of walnut and padauk, this desk sits heavily in the center of the Studio, but remains somewhat hidden under its new desktop.[30] It is carved, accentuating its angular construction, and is somewhat difficult to use as the drawers stick and the matching chair is small and low to the ground.

After this failed experiment,[31] Esherick quickly adopted the modernist idea that "form follows function" — that the design for anything, furniture in this case, should be directly derived from its usage. This epiphany led to a definitive fissure in Esherick's style. Sharp geometric angles became smooth and fluid curves, dense beams and supports became slim and elegant legs, and heavily carved surfaces became soft to the touch. This transition is most obvious in works like his famed *Three Legged Stools* (1950-70) and the top of the *Flat Top Desk.* The stools, the only work that Esherick made consistent multiples of, are the most pure examples of this style change. The seat itself is irregular in shape but usually maintains a somewhat three-sided form (fig. 13). The center of the seat is carved out slightly, creating an indentation appropriate for someone to sit on. The edges are tapered and smoothed, rounding off the form so

[30] This space is referred to as the Gallery in the Museum's Docent Handbook.
[31] The original desktop was made of a thick sheet of aluminum in an attempt to explore it as a medium. Esherick found that it was cold and uncomfortable to work on, so he used it to create other works. The second desktop was made of wood, but Esherick sold it to a client as a coffee table.

that there is no truly flat plane; the top and bottom flow together seamlessly. The legs of the stool are simple turned rods, tapered at both ends and tipped with felt. The supports between the legs are also turned rods, but they are placed so that they do not intersect and are not at the same level. This design adds structural integrity and aesthetic interest. Each individual part is connected using round mortise and tenon joints, negating the need for any hardware.

While different in execution, the top of the *Flat Top Desk* is much the same in style. The shape of the desktop looks nearly identical to one of the stool's seats, but elongated and thickened. The main difference between the two is Esherick's disregard for traditional woodworking methods in the desktop. Esherick had no taste for bookmatching, so the planks that make up the desktop are wedge-shaped and flipped.[32] This leads to the feathering in the wood spreading to many different areas on the surface, rather than occupying one isolated space as is traditionally done. This quirky technique is one example of the many ways in which Esherick embraced the unusual nature of his work as his material, emphasizing it rather than disguising it; he often took mundane forms and added a slight variation, such as the twisting of the chimney of the Workshop.

Aspects of both artists' styles are integrated into the final design of the Workshop. However, due to their complicated relationship, these elements and decisions often became mixed with each other. The structure is undoubtedly modern, but with aspects that often blend forms, ideas, and materials.

[32] Bookmatching is a method of laying wood in which two halves of a split log or plank are laid symmetrical to each other, like opening a book. Features in the wood, like the pattern of the grain, are then mirrored against each other. In this particular situation with Esherick's *Flat Top Desk*, rather than being perfectly symmetrical, the planks are laid symmetrical, but one is spun 180°.

The Collaboration

The steps in each artist's development lead us to August of 1955, when the plans for the Workshop were in their infancy. While Kahn's sensibility dominates the original design for the Workshop, Esherick still managed to make his mark on the final building. Through a few underhanded alterations and spontaneous additions to the exterior, Esherick made this otherwise dissimilar building fit with his property and his own aesthetic.

Kahn's weight in the design of the building is extremely evident. Interlocking geometry — the three hexagons attached at one edge — is characteristic of Tyng's direct influence on Kahn.[33] For example, the final form of the Workshop bears a striking resemblance to Kahn's original design for the Bernard and Norma Shapiro House in Narberth, Pennsylvania (fig. 14).[34] That design from 1959, three years after the Workshop was built, also consists of three attached hexagons. However, these hexagons are attached in the center by a communal area occupied by the kitchen and living space, rather than being connected along the edges.[35] Unfortunately, this version of the design was never built; the budget for the design would have far exceeded what the couple could afford. This makes the Workshop Kahn and Tyng's only successful hexagonal design.[36]

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[33] George H. Marcus and William Whitaker, *The Houses of Louis Kahn* (New Haven: Yale, 2013) page 52.
[34] Ibid.
[35] George H. Marcus and William Whitaker, *The Houses of Louis Kahn* (New Haven: Yale, 2013) page 161. Kahn took the Shapiros to see both the Weiss house and the Trenton Bath House, the latter being very impressive to them. Their impression of the Bath House is likely what prompted Kahn to design a geometric, pavillion-style home for them.
[36] Kahn had previously created designs for the Philadelphia Row House Project in the early 1953, and Tyng had created a model for a school in Bucks County, Pennsylvania in 1952. Neither of those projects were built. (George H. Marcus and William Whitaker, *The Houses of Louis Kahn* (New Haven: Yale, 2013))

However, after the Workshop's design was finalized, Esherick decided to make a few unauthorized changes. Dissatisfied with how straight and angular the walls of the Workshop were, Esherick would kick the cinder blocks at the base of the wall at night to create a slight indentation where the foundation is exposed.[37] This intentional arcing of traditionally level forms is also seen in the Studio, where the roofline is curved and the walls of the stone exterior are tapered inward. The wall's curve is still visible where the foundation is exposed both in the interior and on the exterior of the Workshop. In addition, as he did on the Studio, Esherick asked the masons to not fill the spaces where the cinder block walls come together at the corners.[38] He thought that this negative space looked similar to dovetails, which he used as often as possible in his own craft, and wanted to emphasize.[39]

Moreover, the exterior surface of the Workshop, which was originally intended to be simple gray stucco, became a colorful and evolving surface after Esherick's intercession. The light blue walls, faded as they are now, brighten the density of the forest surrounding them. Applying pigment to the stucco in this way likely served as inspiration for Esherick's Silo addition to the Studio ten years later. The Silo is pigmented as well, in addition to being made of a similar stucco, this time mirroring the fall foliage surrounding the Studio when it was built. The base of the Silo starts with wide passes of light blue and rust, simulating tree trunks and the sky

[37] Mansfield Bascom in discussion with the author, 6 November 2019.
[38] Ibid. Bill and Horace Hartshaw were cousins; Bill was a mason and Horace was a carpenter. Horace lived on Jug Hollow Road, just a few miles from Esherick's property, and helped him build the 1926 Studio. When the Workshop design was finalized, Esherick sought Bill and Horace's help once again. However, Esherick often gave them instructions contrary to Kahn's, because Kahn was not on site to tell them otherwise. The Hartshaws were concerned that the walls would not be sturdy enough to stay standing when the joints were carved out, because they would only then be a single inch thick at the widest overlap. Esherick convinced them to press on regardless. This was not unlike when the 1926 Studio was being built and Esherick convinced the cousins to carve out an inch or two of mortar from between the stones to emphasize their individual shapes.
[39] Dovetails are a method of wood joinery in which triangle-shaped slots, with the narrow angle at the edge, are cut in a plank of wood. The plank is joined to another plank, usually at a right angle, that has the same triangular slots, but in alternating places, like a jigsaw puzzle.

breaking through between them. As the strokes move upward, the surface becomes muddled with yellows and greens, representing the turning autumn foliage. These large patches are indistinguishable up close, but the image becomes more clear with distance. As the treeline was much lower then than it is now, the structure would have camouflaged itself within the woods. The coloring of the Silo also ties the three structures on the property together: the raw pigments, and therefore the colors, are the same as the ones Esherick used for the stripes on the Garage and for the entirety of the surface of the Workshop. The use of material and color here brings unity to the site, so that no one structure feels out of place despite their vastly different forms.

The Workshop's windows, as discussed earlier, are positioned to Esherick's specifications as initially planned. Unlike many of his contributions, these were planned and discussed prior to construction. They are facing south, looking out over the Great Valley, allowing for light to come through without any other distractions. Certainly, floor-to-ceiling windows are not an uncommon concept in architecture. The particular styling of these windows is a combination of Esherick's and Kahn's styles. In this situation, Kahn had to navigate his own artistic inclinations with Esherick's request for a view of the Valley. Framing the windows in a vertical and narrow orientation, so that the windows touched on the sides, allowed him to stretch the windows from wall to wall. Kahn had previously employed this technique in the Samuel and Ruth Genel House, completed five years prior in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania (fig. 15).[40] On the east edge of the entrance court, the exterior wall of the home is made entirely of vertically aligned rectangular windows. Kahn also played with the use of vertical windows on the Margaret

[40] George H. Marcus and William Whitaker, *The Houses of Louis Kahn* (New Haven: Yale, 2013) page 128.

Esherick House, begun in 1959 and built for Wharton Esherick's niece (fig. 16).[41] This particular design utilizes windows differently than the other homes, elongating them further and narrowing them even more. Windows in this style are particularly found between the library shelves and above the fireplace, between the wall of the home and the chimney that juts out from the wall and rises up independently.

However, in all of these designs, the top and bottom edges of the windows are level with each other. The difference between these windows and those in the Workshop implies that the particular alignment, or lack thereof, of the windows was Esherick's preference. It is a common quip among the docents at the Wharton Esherick Museum that "there's no such thing as level" in Esherick's work, particularly his architecture, and that is exemplified by the staggered framing of the window. This particular styling was, thus, Kahn's navigation of his own architectural inclinations and Esherick's quirky aesthetic.

Similarly to the windows, the actual location of the Workshop on Esherick's property is likely something Esherick and Kahn agreed upon. Esherick's 1926 Studio was already on the property when the Workshop was designed, set partially into the hillside, and it likely served as inspiration for the siting. Kahn also sited many of his homes on hills, including the Genel, Shapiro, and Oser houses. In all of these cases, the buildings have multiple entrances, all on different levels, to allow for optimum functionality and ease. Though the Workshop does not have entrances at different elevations (given that it is only one story tall), it is set into the hillside and it does have two different entrances meant for two different purposes as discussed previously, still broadening the use of the building.

[41] Esherick also contributed to this house. He chose a beam to support the stairwell, and designed the entirety of the kitchen. He was originally supposed to design all the fixtures and furniture for the home, but he was abruptly cut out of the contract. (George H. Marcus and William Whitaker, *The Houses of Louis Kahn* (New Haven: Yale, 2013))

Despite this, the Workshop's roofs, and therefore the interior ceiling, are similar to those found in other buildings on which Kahn and Tyng partnered. They reflect elements of the Trenton Bath House as well as the Fred and Elaine Clever House in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, completed in 1962 (fig. 17). The ceilings of both of these buildings have wooden interior structures with geometric styling, creating patterned shapes that are left exposed rather than purely utilitarian structural supports. The Bath House, as discussed previously, is made of five pavilions attached at the corners, with pyramidal roofs and an oculus at the peak. The beams supporting the roof run perpendicular to the edge, creating the illusion of rays of light originating from the oculus. While similar in structure, the geometry of the ceiling in the Clever House has a different effect. Here, the beams in the main living room are laid out in a four-point star pattern, leading into skylights and subtly directing inhabitants toward the other rooms of the home. This form is also mirrored in the smaller modules of the home branching off of the central living space. In the Workshop, however, the beams serve to separate the different pavilions that make up the structure. While three beams stem from the peak of the roof, three additional beams run perpendicular to the main three, isolating each parallelogram-shaped section of the roof from the section next to it. This speaks to Esherick's step-by-step process of woodworking — completely finishing one step in the creative process before moving onto the next step and physically moving to the next module of the Workshop — as well as the hexagonal geometry that so fascinated Tyng, and therefore Kahn.

While the ceiling suggests that Kahn's influence over the design of the Workshop's interior is more readily observable, as with the building's exterior, Esherick left his distinctive aesthetic mark, on his own terms. The fireplace in the central hexagon is a prime example of

Esherick's input. Interestingly, this design was not the first fireplace proposed for the Workshop. Kahn's original drawings instead show a sleek, rectilinear *inglenook* (fig. 18). The space is nearly square, with a small rectangular niche for the burning logs in the bottom left corner. The remaining area of the square is distinguished as another material, delineated by lightly applied pencil strokes and a cluster of darker round forms, but what either of those lines actually represent is unclear. The square space is surrounded by a post and lintel-esque construction, including a vertical, rough-hewn wooden beam to try and cater to Esherick's taste. To the left is a larger, colored-in rectangle, representing the entrance to the Workshop's bathroom. The design resembles similar elements in Kahn's Weiss and Oser houses, which both have a space for firewood and an understated mantle. The surface surrounding the fireplace in these three homes is also distinct from the rest of the interior, employing murals, tile, and marble slabs respectively. We might consider these to be "accent walls," using contemporary language.

This design, very clearly and neatly sketched, is large and central on the page. However, in the bottom corner, a smaller drawing was added in, almost as an afterthought. After examining this drawing, I believe that the large fireplace in the center was indeed drawn by Kahn, but the smaller design in the lower left corner was drawn by Esherick as a counter. The central drawing bears a strong resemblance to Kahn's sketches for the interior *inglenook* in the Weiss House (fig. 19). Both drawings are incredibly crisp and confident; even areas that are less clearly delineated, like the shadows or the knick-knacks on shelves or in cubbies, still show remarkable intention. The space Kahn creates is rectilinear and self-containing, creating an intimate heart to the home. The mural, discussed earlier, is also beginning to take shape here. The parallels in design between the Weiss *inglenook* and the Workshop's fireplace are not entirely unusual; plans for the

Workshop were discussed a mere five years after the Weiss House was complete, and Kahn is known to have viewed the hearth as the center of the home, always including one in his designs.[42]

However, the smaller drawing in the lower right corner seems to be by a different hand — the hand of his client, Esherick. One primary clue to this interaction is the manner in which the interior corner of the Workshop is drawn. The lines indicating the carved-out joints where the cinder blocks meet are single, horizontal strokes as opposed to the pairs of vertical lines on the central drawing. Kahn was incredibly consistent in his mark making from sketch to sketch, and it is especially unlikely that he would have made this change on the same page. Additionally, the line that indicates where the floor meets the wall is at an angle, rather than being drawn flat like it is in the central drawing. The flat line more closely resembles elevation drawings, and as an architect, Kahn would have been exceedingly familiar with this method. Unfamiliar with formal architectural drafting, and more in tune with formal artistic technique, Esherick would have attempted to draw what he *observed*.

What truly indicates Esherick's hand in this drawing, however, is the manner in which the curvature of the mantle is drawn. The lightly applied, curving pencil marks moving horizontally across the surface of the mantle are very similar to the way in which Esherick depicts curvature and volume in his schematics for his furniture and other drawings. In *Sketch for a Cherry Cocktail Table* (c. 1930), for example, the horizontal tracing along the surface of the table indicates the curve that the far edge of the tabletop (fig. 20). Furthermore, in *Sketch of a Woman* (c. 1930) the same contour hatching is used to indicate the volume of the sitter's legs,

[42] Alison Olsen in discussion with the author, 19 November 2019.

arms, and torso (fig. 21). In this particular case, the distance between the lines indicate the tightness of the curves. This kind of contour hatching is not seen in any of Kahn's other sketches, for the Workshop or otherwise.[43]

Interestingly, however, there are mantle fixtures with a similar shape to the Workshop's fireplace associated with the sketches for the Weiss House (fig. 22). These images seem to have little connection with the final plan for the home, as their forms are not found anywhere in the building as it stands, but they may have been proposed ideas for the hood of an outdoor barbeque.[44] The shape itself — a cone with a rounded opening — is nearly identical to the shape of the fireplace in the Workshop. The difference between these sketches and the small sketch for the Workshop is not in shape or form, but in the details, primarily the way mark making is handled for each. On the Weiss sketches, presumably drawn by Kahn, the forms are shaded with varying degrees of applied pressure on the charcoal. The marks themselves are simply jagged lines, executed quickly but with notable intent. The shading here is very similar to the shading on Kahn's sketch for the Weiss *inglenook*, especially just around the base of the fireplace itself. No marks on these sketches resemble those in the smaller Workshop sketch. Considering the informal, cordial relationship that Kahn and Esherick had, in addition to the casual terms of their collaboration, it is incredibly likely that the small sketch was, indeed, drawn by Esherick in response to Kahn's larger, more dominating design.

This smaller drawing is how the fireplace actually came to be (fig. 23). The mantle is conical, but inlaid into the wall. The bottom along the floor has an arch carved out to

[43] When I raised this issue to William Whitaker, I also pondered if this could have been a sketch by Tyng, as I had not studied her individual drawings as deeply. I asked what her drawing style looked like, to which he replied, "Well, not like *that*!"
[44] William Whitaker in discussion with the author, 19 November 2019.

accommodate logs and coal. The surface of the mantle is the same stucco as the walls surrounding it, but is colored the same dusty plum as the exterior chimney. While this design is certainly unusual, it is not quite as unusual for Esherick. This kind of fireplace, one made with an inlaid cone-shape and an arched opening, is seen multiple times throughout his career. The first example of this was in the Bok house's "book room" in Gulph Mills, Pennsylvania, on which construction began in 1935. While the home itself is no longer extant, the interiors that Curtis and Nellie Bok commissioned Esherick for have been removed and are currently preserved in the collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Wolfsonian-FIU Museum, and in a private collection.[45] This fireplace, as well as the chimney that it was connected to, are very similar to that in the Workshop. The fireplace itself is a wide, engaged cone with an arched opening, leading up and outside the home to a twisted, faceted chimney. While this chimney is stone rather than stucco, the curves still follow the same paths as those in the Workshop's chimney, which was built twenty years later. The Workshop fireplace is also similar to that of the Michael and Nicoleta Watson house in Pittsford, New York. Prior to the complete remodeling of this home's interior in 2015, its fireplace and chimney were similar to that in the Bok house.[46] The same arched opening is seen here, though the mantle is fairly different, and the chimney is even more twisted and sweeping.[47] Ultimately, Esherick's preferences won out over Kahn's in the design of the Workshop's fireplace. However, despite his seeming stubbornness in design,

[45] De Muzio, David. "Wharton Esherick's Music Room from the Curtis Bok House, Gulph Mills, Pennsylvania, 1935–1938." *Winterthur Portfolio* 46, no. 2/3 (2012): E58-74. doi:10.1086/668642.
[46] Stacy Freed, "Curves, Color and a Killer Kitchen in Bushnell's Basin," Democrat & Chronicle, USA Today, 22 May 2015, https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/rochester-magazine/life-style/2015/05/22/home-house-renovation-remodel-kitchen-yellow-marble-historic/27776035/.
[47] The fireplace in the Watson house is nearly identical to the grill Esherick built in the Silo addition in 1965. The greatest difference between them is that the opening of the Silo grill is midway up the wall, as it was intended for cooking in addition to warmth.

Esherick did concede to Kahn's *inglenook* idea by building a bench specifically for the Workshop's fireplace.

This analysis raises two equally important questions: What was the true nature of the relationship between these two artists, and why has the building they designed together been essentially forgotten in scholarship? Esherick and Kahn's partnership can be represented by the dueling sketches of the fireplace. Kahn was the planner: he imagined and eventually finalized the design, bringing a drawing on a page to life with his client's needs and desires in mind. But Esherick, the modifier, always seemed to step in at the last minute and make changes. He, from his place on the sidelines of the design process, still made a mark on the structure, thus changing it significantly from Kahn's original design in both the planning and building phases. Just like the drawing, Kahn's ideas are grand and central, but Esherick's are underhanded, off to the side, and hard to notice at first.

That dichotomy is precisely the reason why, I believe, the Workshop is missing from the literature on both men. What prevents the buildings recognition is not merely that derived from an informal agreement, as both Kahn and Esherick have more prominent works that stemmed from friendships rather than formal contracts or arrangements, but rather the fact that this building does not "fit in" with either man's other works. It is no longer fully a Kahn building because of the manner in which Esherick made changes to the design, and it was never truly an Esherick building because the majority of his contributions were made after the design was finalized. For this reason, the Workshop sits in a gray area of authorship.

That uncertainty in authorship contributes to the confusion of aesthetics and styles within the project as well. Though some elements of the building have strong similarities and links to

one of the designers, such as the ceilings and the fireplace, most other aspects are a blend of each designer's own creative preferences. The windows and the overall shape of the Workshop are two examples. The narrow floor-to-ceiling windows are reminiscent of Kahn's other domestic designs, but the staggering of the frames distances them from him. Additionally, Tyng's fascination with geometric forms found in nature (like hexagons) brings together Esherick's more organic perspective and Kahn's angular practice. This dynamic causes the lines dividing those styles to blur and become indistinguishable from each other without a close examination the building closely and the other works of its creators.

The Legacy of the Workshop

In the late 1960s, Esherick fell into some financial problems. His poor bookkeeping and lack of steady income had him under threat of bankruptcy. His daughter Ruth and her husband Mansfield "Bob" Bascom agreed to buy the property and assume the mortgage to allow him to keep the Studio and, to some extent, serve as his caretakers.[48] Their agreement maintained Esherick on the deed, but also stipulated that the couple would permanently move into the Workshop. Mansfield, being an architect himself, was able to make all the necessary changes to convert it from a workspace to a livable home. Major changes included insulating the entire space, adding air conditioning and baseboard heating, and replacing the asphalt shingle roof with a copper one.[49] Prior to these revisions, though the fireplace and radiators had been a source of warmth, without insulation, the Workshop did not retain any meaningful amount of heat. The

[48] The property, at this point in time, had been reduced to the area immediately surrounding the Studio and Workshop. Other homes had been built along Horseshoe Trail, the Farmhouse had been sold, and the roads were becoming busier and more accessible. Therefore, the actual plot of land that Ruth and Mansfield bought is the property currently open to visitors to the Wharton Esherick Museum.
[49] Mansfield Bascom in discussion with the author, 6 November 2019.

asphalt roof was also beginning to deteriorate, but the new copper roof could last up to a century and was laid specifically to facilitate better drainage.[50]

The couple also made changes to allow the Workshop to better fit their lifestyle. Primarily, interior partitions and walls were added to create room divisions. The eastern module was divided into a foyer, bedroom, coat closet, and office with a loft storage area above.[51] Bascom used the storage space for his architectural drawings, most of which are still in the Workshop. The bathroom door was also moved to be on the wall between this module and the central one so that it was closer to the bedroom. Inside the bathroom, the shower was replaced with a new bathtub and skylight.[52] The central hexagon was left open and served as a living room and dining room. Clerestory windows were added around the door and chimney, and the chimney was remodeled.[53] The westmost hexagon was converted into a kitchen, conservatory, and utility closet that leads to the loading doors. The kitchen was constructed to look as close to Esherick's work as possible, though he had no input on the design.[54] The conservatory was a challenge for Bascom, as he had to have the floor lowered to the concrete slab. A skylight and a door were added here as well; the skylight would help create room for the large tree that he and Ruth wanted to add to accomodate for their collection of exotic orchids.[55]

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[50] Mansfield Bascom in discussion with the author, 6 November 2019.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Mansfield Bascom and Roger Thorne. *Ruth Esherick Bascom: The Extraordinary Life and Times of an Artist's Daughter* (Berwyn: Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society, 2017) Ruth painted a seascape mural on the walls surrounding the tub that remains relatively intact today, even with exposure to moisture and sunlight.
[53] Mansfield Bascom in discussion with the author, 6 November 2019. The twisting pattern that Esherick had desired for the chimney had been incorrectly executed by the builders. The twist was supposed to flow the same direction inside and outside of the building, but it was constructed so that the interior and exterior were twisting in opposite directions. Though Esherick was opposed to adding the clerestory windows, Bascom thinks he allowed it because the chimney was fixed.
[54] Mansfield Bascom in discussion with the author, 6 November 2019.
[55] Ibid.

The majority of furniture that the couple used was made by Esherick; it was either created specifically for them or was already in the Workshop when they moved in. They also stored larger works there once the Studio became the Museum, as to not overcrowd the space. Currently, the Workshop is home to many objects and works that visitors often ask about and would like to see, such as *Reverence* (1942) and Esherick's bike-wheel band saw (1927).[56] Unfortunately, while Bascom is living there, visitors are not permitted inside the Workshop.[57]

However, this restriction may be lifted with his passing. The Museum is currently working on a plan to incorporate all of its facilities into a cohesive visitor experience. This includes the Garage, Studio, and Woodshed, which had been open to visitors, as well as the Sunekrest Farmhouse, the Workshop, and the recently acquired Octagonal Schoolhouse on Diamond Rock Road.[58] Specific plans for the Workshop have not yet been established, but the overall concept is to use the space for either special programs, like classes or lectures, or as a larger rotating exhibition space. While this planning process has its own logistical challenges, maintaining the history of Esherick and his work requires the unification and preservation of his various homes, workspaces, artworks, and in the case of the Workshop, relationships.

The Workshop is an incredibly valuable project; it brought together two influential Philadelphian creatives, working with divergent styles, in different circles, and for different patrons, but with strikingly similar personalities and desires for their works. Not only did the

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[56] John Schmidt had originally made a motorized band saw for himself when power lines were extended to reach his property. Esherick requested that he build a second, but that this one would include a lathe and circular saw. Mansfield Bascom, *Wharton Esherick: The Journey of a Creative Mind* (New York: Abrams, 2010)

[57] There are two occasions in which individuals who are not museum employees are allowed into the Workshop. The first is at the annual Members' Party in September, and the second is at the Volunteers' Party in January. Otherwise, no one is permitted access during the Museum's opening without advanced plans or access granted by the Executive Director.

[58] Esherick supposedly used that space as a painting studio in the 1920s. While the Museum oversees the structure, tours and stewardship are managed by the The Diamond Rock Schoolhouse Preservation Association.

project pair Kahn and Esherick, but it currently bridges a gap in their scholarship. This structure sheds light on an aspect of both men, their relationship with one another as friends and collaborators, that has received little recognition until now. In fact, the building as a whole largely goes unrecognized, and therefore, so does that entire facet of both of these men. Therefore, the Workshop and its history are integral to any comprehensive and holistic examination of either of its creators.

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Fig. 1, Wharton Esherick and Louis Kahn, 1965 Workshop (Esherick Studio Addition), northeast view, 1956, Malvern, Pennsylvania.

Fig. 2, Wharton Esherick, Studio, 1926-1966, Malvern, PA. Photo courtesy of the Wharton Esherick Museum.

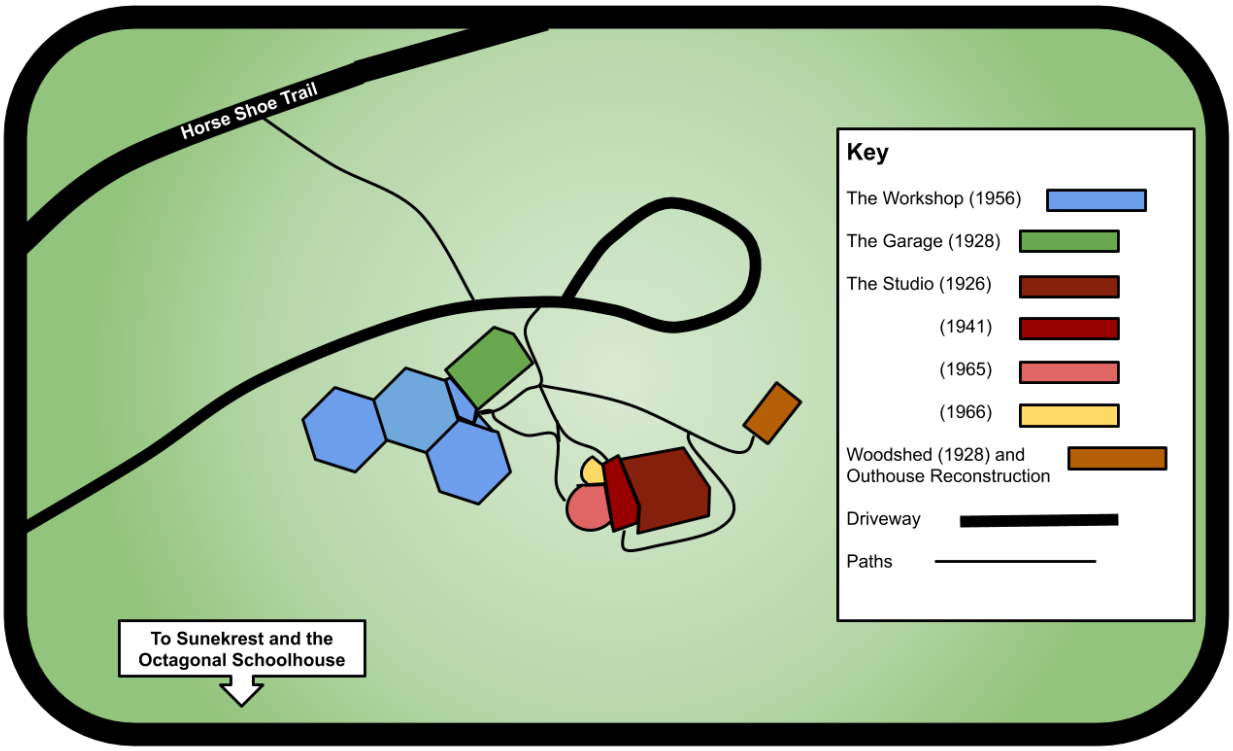

Fig. 3, Map of Esherick's property as it stands today.

Fig. 4, Wharton Esherick and Louis Kahn, 1965 Workshop (Esherick Studio Addition), western view, 1956, Malvern, Pennsylvania.

Fig. 5, Wharton Esherick and Louis Kahn, 1965 Workshop (Esherick Studio Addition) and Garage, 1956 and 1928, Malvern, Pennsylvania.

Fig. 6, Wharton Esherick and Louis Kahn, 1965 Workshop (Esherick Studio Addition), southern view, 1956, Malvern, Pennsylvania.

Fig. 7, Louis Kahn and Anne Tyng, Yale University Art Gallery Addition, 1953, New Haven, Connecticut

Fig. 8, Louis Kahn and Anne Tyng, Morton and Lenore Weiss House, 1950, East Norriton, Pennsylvania

Fig. 9, Louis Kahn and Anne Tyng, Trenton Bath House, 1954, Ewing Township, New Jersey

Fig. 10, Wharton Esherick, *Drop Leaf Desk,* 1925-27, Wharton Esherick Museum, Malvern, Pennsylvania. Photo courtesy of James Mario.

Fig. 11, Wharton Esherick, *Flat Top Desk,* pedestal in 1929, current desktop in 1962, Wharton Esherick Museum, Malvern, Pennsylvania

Fig. 12, Wharton Esherick, Garage (now Visitor Center), 1928, Wharton Esherick Museum, Malvern, Pennsylvania

Fig. 13, Wharton Esherick, *Three Legged Stools,* production began in 1950, Photo courtesy of the Wharton Esherick Museum

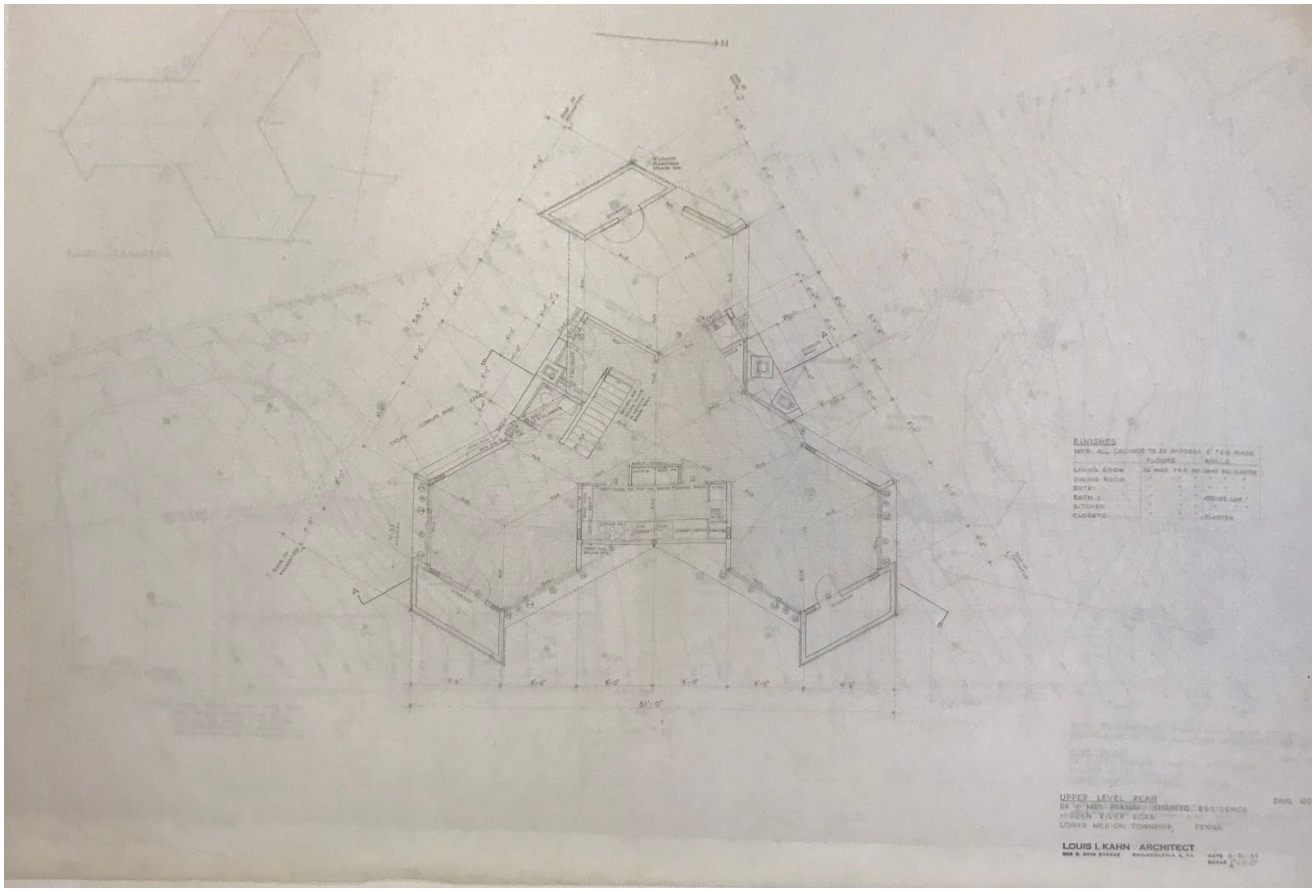

Fig. 14, Office of Louis Kahn, First design for the Bernard and Norma Shapiro House in Narberth, Pennsylvania, 1959, University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives, Louis Kahn Collection, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Fig. 15, Louis Kahn, Samuel and Ruth Genel House, 1951, Wynnewood, Pennsylvania

Fig. 16, Louis Kahn, Wharton Esherick, Margaret Esherick House, 1959, Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania.

Fig. 17, Louis Kahn and Anne Tyng, Fred and Elaine Clever House, 1962, Cherry Hill, New Jersey

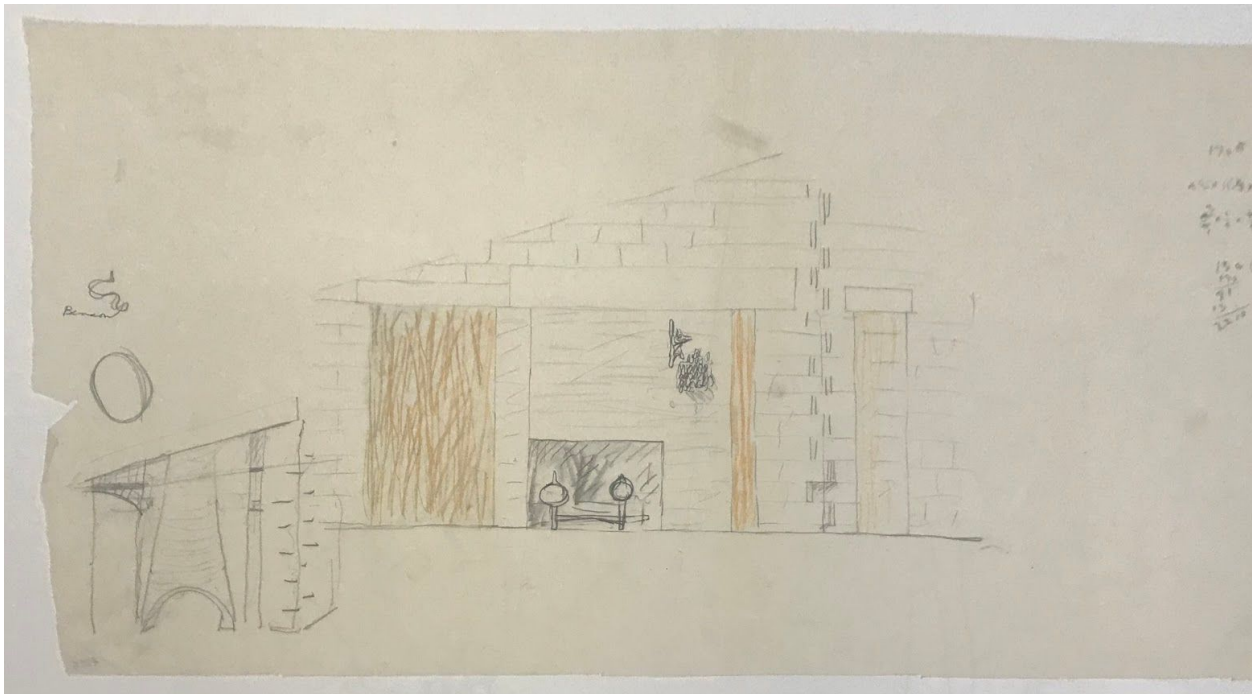

Fig. 18, Louis Kahn and Wharton Esherick, *Fireplace Sketches,* c. 1955, University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives, Louis Kahn Collection, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

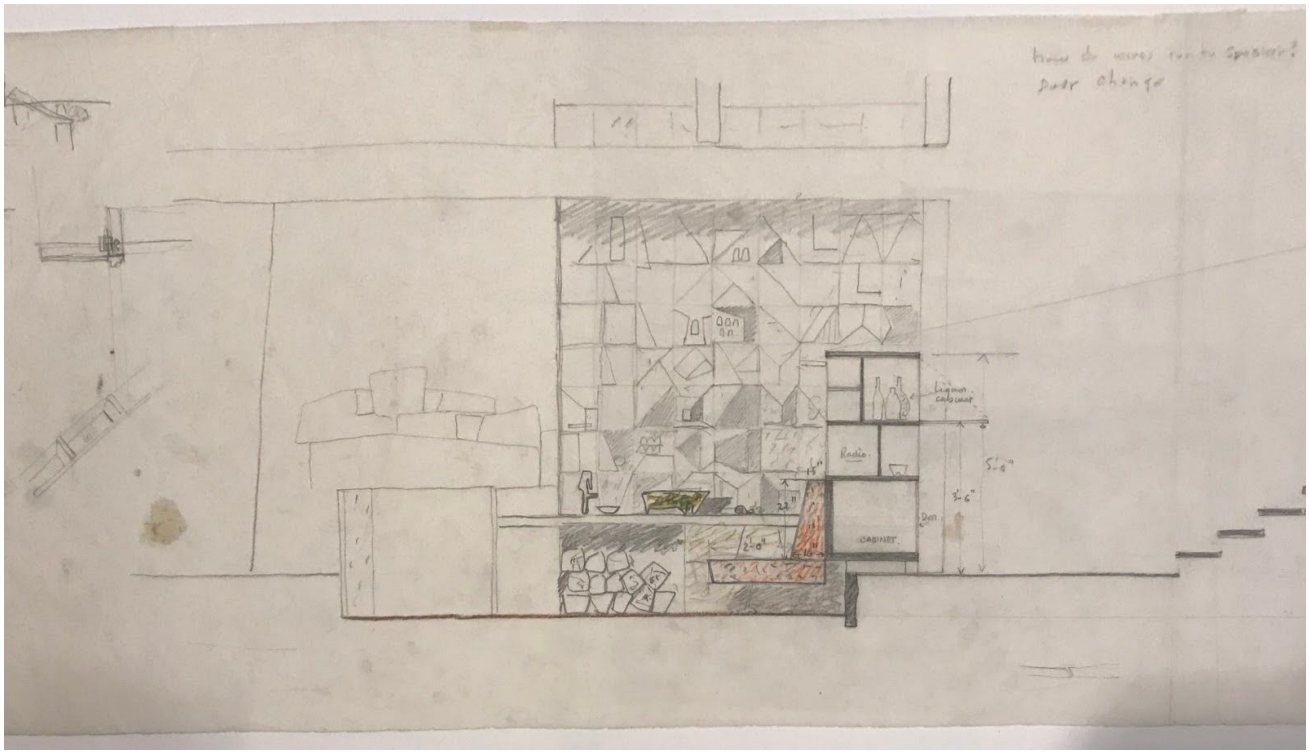

Fig. 19, Louis Kahn, *Sketch for Weiss Inglenook,* c. 1950, University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives, Louis Kahn Collection, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Fig. 20, Wharton Esherick, *Sketch for a Cherry Cocktail Table,* c. 1930, Wharton Esherick Museum, Malvern, Pennsylvania

Fig. 21, Wharton Esherick, *Sketch of a Woman,* c. 1930, Wharton Esherick Museum, Malvern, Pennsylvania

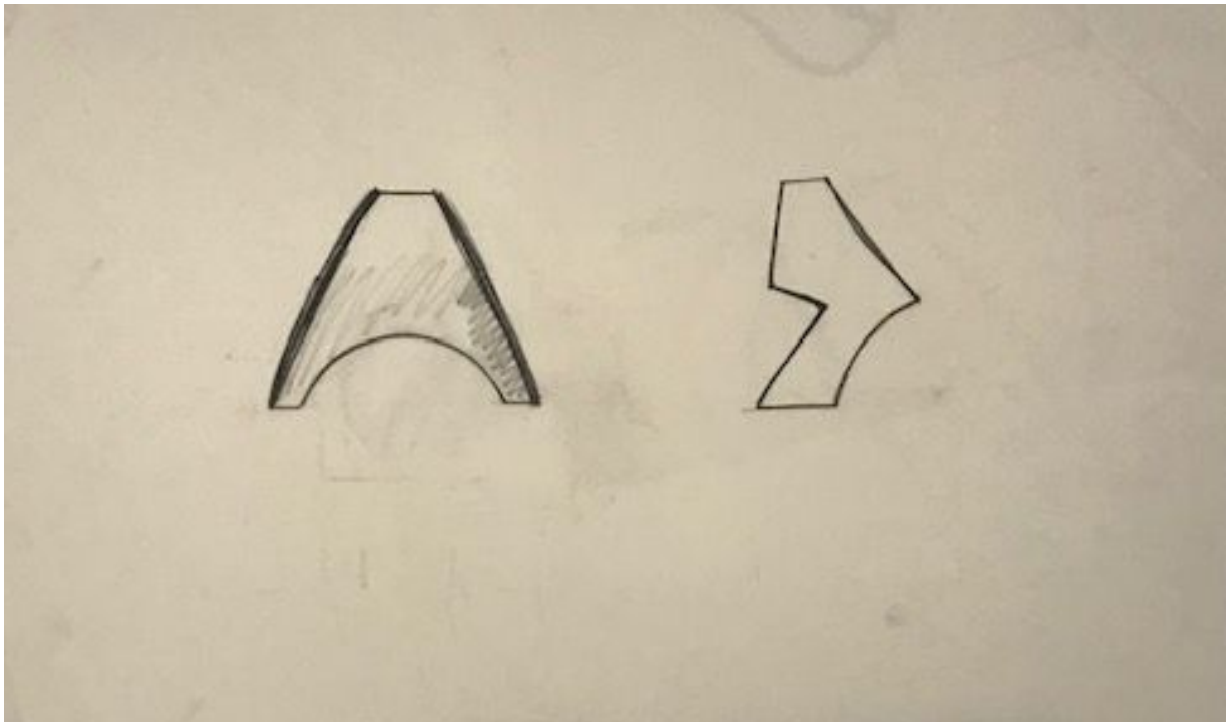

Fig. 22, Office of Louis Kahn, *Sketches for Outdoor Barbeque Hood,* c. 1950, University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives, Louis Kahn Collection, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Fig. 23, Louis Kahn and Wharton Esherick, Fireplace in 1956 Workshop, 1956, Malvern, Pennsylvania